

The Barren FIG-TREE.

A.

S E R M O N.

Preached on October 21st, 1742,

IN THE
HIGH-CHURCH-YARD
OF
GLASGOW.

*Before the Celebration of the Lord's
Supper there.*

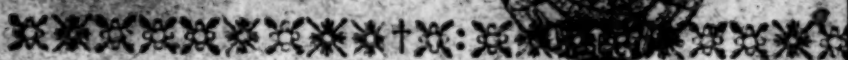
By the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD.

*Taken from his own mouth, and published at the desire
of many of the Hearers.*

G L A S G O W.

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M D C C L X X V I I.



MARR XI. 13. 14. *And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if happily he might find any thing thereon; and when he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.*

HERE I see a large assembly, and I think a very attentive assembly, and I would hope you are all come here this morning with an intention to begin and to go on, and end this day with God. I would hope that you do not intend to mock the great God. But as the day is more especially set apart for fasting and prayer, for a day of humiliation before the great God: You would take care to answer the end of the church, and in your public and secret devotion take care to humble yourselves before the great God. Many circumstances call us to fasting before the Lord, and especially, a call to prepare for the table of the Lord, to meet Jesus at his blessed table, such a call as that ought more especially to be hearkened unto; for those who humble themselves most, and bring the most humble and contrite heart along with them, will certainly be most acceptable unto God. 'Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble Spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' But then, on such a day as this, you are not only to humble yourselves in particular for your own sins, but you are to call to mind the sins of your nation in general; you are to call to mind the wretched and dismal condition of both church and state: And let those have a part in your secret devotion, that we may be sensible of, what a vile ungrateful barren people we have been, that we may see what cause we have to humble ourselves before the Lord, what cause to stand, lest the Lord should unchurch us, and take his kingdom from us. I have chosen the words of this text as a subject of your morning meditation.

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The words you have been reading, give an account of a great miracle our Saviour was pleased to perform in the days of his flesh; I mean his cursing the barren fig-tree, a miracle, which, like the blessed author of it, has been sadly ridiculed by those who have been perverse enemies unto the Son of God; Our Saviour has been sadly abused in his character on account of this miracle, as being an angry and unjust man, for cursing a tree, and which was not his own. Thus our Saviour is represented by one of his noted enemies, He says, 'Our Saviour came upon a fig-tree when he could not expect to find fruit, and, being hungry, and finding no fruit on the tree, he, in a great passion and ill nature, cursed a tree that was not his own.' Thus was our Saviour abused in his character, and let not his members think it strange if they meet with the same treatment, be not unwilling to bear a part of his glorious cross. But there is no occasion for this slander, it is all calumny, and therefore, as the Lord enables me at this time, I shall endeavour to shew you the import of the miracle, and clear it from these aspersions cast on it. 2dly, Shew you the reason why our Lord cursed the fig-tree, and then endeavour to make application suitable to a day of fasting and humiliation.

First, I shall clear the miracle from the aspersions cast upon it and our Lord, on the account of it, by the adversaries of our religion. We see in the 12th verse it's said, 'On the morrow when he was come from Bethany, he was hungry,' observe that the Lord Jesus Christ took upon him all the sinful infirmities of human nature; Jesus Christ was subject to weariness of body, to hunger, and thirst: He sat on the well being weary, he was as we are, only without sin, very weak, very unfirm, and this ought to give you comfort that are weary in your work, though not of your work, Remember that your Lord Jesus Christ was weary. He was now hungry, amazing that Jesus Christ should have stooped thus! he that by a word speaking, could create millions of worlds, yet should be hungry for you and me! He had been riding in triumph into Jerusalem, had retired to some poor cot house in Bethany all night, and come in the morning hungry, lacking food

unto his body, but O unspeakably more hungring after the salvation of souls ! It's remarkable, that though he was often hungry and in wants, yet he wrought no miracle to relieve himself, but many to relieve others, this may comfort those that are poor, and want bread. O look up, the Lord Jesus was hungry before thee.

Verle 13th, ' And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came if happily he might find any thing thereon, and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.' Seeing a fig-tree and leaves on it, our blessed Saviour might reasonably expect to find fruit where there were leaves. But here an enemy of our religion charges our Saviour most falsely; for, says he, ' How could it enter into his heart, that he would find fruit on that tree, for, we are told, that the time of figs was not yet.' But this is all for want of understanding of the text, ' He came if happily he might find any thing thereon, and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet.' That is, the time of gathering the ripe figs was not yet, and therefore, Jesus might reasonably expect that there was some fruit on that tree; Jesus Christ finds leaves when he had reason to expect to find fruit, and then Jesus said unto it, ' Never man find fruit on thee hereafter for ever.' Here he is blamed for being in passion, because being disappointed of having his appetite satisfied. And thereafter for cursing another man's tree that was not his own, but it was his own fig-tree, for he created it, the whole earth was the Son of God's, he might do with it as he pleased. He gave it the man, and he might take it away, he was not unjust, for he took nothing but what was his own. It appears, that our blessed Saviour was by no means to blame, on account of cursing this fig-tree. But my dear friends, I shall no longer continue on this, but shew you the great and grand reason in our Lord's cursing this barren fig-tree; and that was to shew, what in a little afterwards should befall the Jewish church. This fig-tree was the very picture of the Jewish church. The church of the Jews was a church that the Lord's right-hand had planted: The Lord God had made the people of the Jews a peculiar people, ' The Lord had not de-

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so with any other nation, as he had with them; the heathen had not the knowledge of his law, the Lord had made them his friends, he had planted them in his vineyard, and he had erected a vine press among them, the Lord had committed unto them the oracles of God, they had the scriptures, and the Pharisees that wear their long robes and preached among them; and were called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi; they had the sabbaths and the new-moons; they had the feast of tabernacles, and in a special manner they had the ordinance of the passover. They had all the external things that could make a church glorious; they had church-judicatories, they had general assemblies, synods, and kirk sessions, and they had magistrates as well as ministers, they were the Lord's professing people. But, like this fig tree, they only brought forth leaves; God had caused them to take root downward, and grow upward; God had visited them from time to time, but, when God came, still nothing but leaves! And that which was worse, God expected they would have brought forth grapes, but behold wild grapes? Corruptions were crept into the Jewish church. The whole head was sick, and the whole heart was faint, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, there was nothing but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores. They kept fasts, but they were not such fasts as the Lord had chosen. They would pray and preach, they would make long prayers, and disfigure their faces, and come and boast in the temple, how often they prayed and fasted. But this was only from the outside, and an outside religion; we may see how ignorant the Pharisees were of inward religion, by our Lord's converse with Nicodemus, who was one of the chief of them, he said, 'how can these things be?' And the High Priest, instead of being friendly to Jesus Christ, hated him in his heart, and would have long since destroyed him, but he feared the people, for he feared to alienate his doctrine and his law. I doubt not but many of you that fear God, and have been mourning for poor Scotland, have prevented me. The Spirit of the Lord has enabled you to make application, that this is the case of poor Scotland. Perhaps I may condemn me for it, in doing so.

not how to give flattering titles unto any when I am speaking for God. 'Tis our duty to tell people what is amiss, that they may humble themselves for it, and that they may be praying to divert the judgments that are hanging over their heads. I appeal to all of you, that knew any thing of the beauty of the church some time ago; if it is not a backsliding church, and if we have not sadly gone from the piety of our forefathers. 'Tis true we have assemblies, synods, and kirk-sessions, and all the courts that the Jews had: And we have got universities and colleges, where the sons of the prophets are brought up, we have got professors and principals, and we have got fasts, and the Lord's Supper celebrated among us; we have got Bibles, and can read, and pray, and sing psalms. Yet many no doubt there are, that do not believe the doctrines of the church of Scotland, that eat of its bread, there are many that are enemies to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. Family religion is neglected, and psalms singing in families laid aside; and profaneness, atheism, and infidelity of all kinds abounding in this city. Is not this, my dear friends, the case? Well, what may we expect? We may expect that he will curse the church of Scotland as he did the barren fig-tree. And if we do not repent, we may expect that God will send forth his armies to destroy us. I am speaking now in the general, and I aimed at no particular person, and I speak not to oppose any, but to humble us all. And, my dear friends, the most of us how little fruit have we brought forth unto God. We are not content with bringing forth no fruit, but we are continually bringing forth bad fruit. And the Christians themselves how cold have they been unto God, how little have we appeared for the Lord of hosts, how much driven down by the fear of men. My dear friends, let us all with one heart, let us with one voice humble ourselves, and rent our hearts, and not our garments. As sure as I am a minister of Christ, I will willingly join with you. O our barrenness! O our unfruitfulness! How little do we for Jesus Christ! I am assured that you will be ashamed of at the day of Jesus Christ. We may well fast and weep, if possible, with tears, we may weep over our neighbours, and you who a

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family, over our own private state, and cry, that the blood of Jesus might cleanse us from all our sins. Our iniquities are so exceeding great, that if God was not infinite in sparing, the Lord would make our name Ichabod, and the glory of God would depart from us. Especially, if we consider what mercy we have received: It's not two years past, since the Lord sent a terrible dearth among us, when by the Lord said, If thou don't return, O church of Scotland! I will send thee all my plagues. The Lord removed that, and has sent two plentiful harvests: and the Lord has sent an awakening through the land. And this has been all ascribed unto the power of the devil. What a sinful nation are we, what may we expect if God deal with us after all our iniquities? we may expect he will deal with us, as he dealt with the barren fig-tree: Withered trees are good for nothing but the fire, and withered souls are good for nothing but to be burning in hell fire. Spend this day in humiliation and prayer, humble yourselves in secret, and if people will not pray for them; beg of God, that God may spare the church of Scotland, and spare our state. We have got another fast proclaimed; pray let us not mock God, O Lord in the gap, you children of the most High God! O children of Abraham, O intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah! and entreat the Lord not to be angry for ever, proceeding for them. If you will not be wounded with the sword of the Spirit, the Lord will make the sword of an enemy to reek in your blood. This is the thing that you can expect. O plead that the Lord spare you not a famine of the word of God! O what should your fathers have given to see these days you I pray you therefore to turn unto the Lord. Let us labour to be more fruitful, lest God should punish them for not bearing fruit. And Jesus Christ curse barren ministers that have only the form of piety without its power, and preach and pray, but do not put in practice themselves: And formal hypocrites which have not the root of the matter in their hearts. My dear friends, it is well there is blood in the water to apply unto; let us go to it this morning. You who are to go to the communion, let us go to it this morning.

Lord, why hast thou been so barren! and done so little
for Christ? adore Jesus Christ that has spared thee so
long, 'tis owing to Jesus Christ, that God has not cut
thee down long ere now. Had not Christ entreated
the Father, you and I had been burning in hell, or
given up to a reprobate mind. O beg of Jesus that
you may not be content with bringing forth leaves on-
ly, but that you may bring forth fruit, faith, love, hope,
joy, and patience and forbearance; and all the graces
of the eternal Spirit. Then God will let us spread
our branches from sea to sea, then Jesus would be once
more the glory of the whole earth, then the Lord Jesus
Christ would delight to be among us, and he would
walk among the seven golden candlesticks; and we
shall be terrible like an army with banners. In a few
days I shall not be speaking to you any more, but be
where I will, I shall be glad to hear that Scotland flour-
ishes, and that your souls are turning unto the Lord.
O return unto him this fast day with weeping, with
fasting and prayer; Say, Lord cut us not down yet
but dung us; that from henceforth we may bring forth
fruit unto holiness, and our end be everlasting life.
My heart is now full, O think of God's condescension
And love and think what God has done for you; and
let his goodness lead you to repentance, and let his
love constrain you. But I shall detain you no longer
from your respective churches, may God break
your hearts, may ministers and people be tender before
God. O I hope you shall have some good days! Now
the societies in Edinburgh have set two days apart
for prayer, do you so here, and see if God will come
among us: don't let us mock God by sitting before him
as his people, and yet having our hearts running at
our covetousness: Let us beg of God to take off
our iniquities, and that we begin to be fruitful,
heartily glorify God by bringing forth fruit, be-
lieve upon the stretch for God, for as much as we know
our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

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